(b) if so, the names of the organisations who have the hosting facilities in India; and

(c) if not, whether Government will consider licensing such facilities?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI JAGMOHAN): (a) Yes. Sir.

(b) VSNL is providing the web hosting facilities. In addition, National Informatics Centre (NIC) and ERNET also offer such' facilities to Educational/Research and Govemment Sector.

(c) As per the new Internet policy, Government is issuing licences to private companies to work as Internet Service Providers. With these licences, the companies can host websites also if so they desire.

Hike in Postal Rates

*280. SHRI ANANTRAY DEVSHANKER DAVE: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the postal rates of stationery have been raised w.e.f. 31st August, 1998, to the extent of 100% and 150% in some cases;

(b) if so, the justification therefor;

(c) whether Government propose to reconsider their earlier decision to give relief to the poor people;

(d) if so, the details thereof;' and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor.

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI JAGMOHAN): (a) and (b) The percentage of increase in rates of eight postal services effected from 3lst August, 1998 ranges from 20% to 150% as per details given below:

(i)	Letter Card	50%
(ii)	Letter	50%
(iii)	Parcel	25%
(iv)	Registration	20%
(v)	Insurance	25-50%
(vi)	Competition Post Card	50%
(vii)	Acknowledgement	100%
(viii)	Money Order Form -	150%

These rates were revised in order to meet partly the increased cost of operation of various postal services requiring considerable subsidy from the general budget. The working expenses of the Department of Posts has increased substantially after the revision of the pay scales with effect from 1.1.1996. It is estimated that even after these revision of tariff the revenue will not be adequate to meet the cost of operation in respect of majority of postal services.

(c) There is no proposal to reconsider the rates revised w.e.f. 31st August, 1998.

(d) Does not arise in view of the reply to, part (c) above.

(e) The impact of revision of rates indicated in reply to parts (a) & (b) is likely to be minimal on poor people as no revision of tariff has been effected in the case of Postcards and in the rate of Money Order commission which are generally used by them.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

Forewarning Regarding Shortage of Onions

2016. SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE:
SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Ministry of Agriculture had received any report/information from the Ministry of Science and Technology or the Meteorological Department/Institute suggesting that there is a possibility of the failure of the onion crop due to unseasonal rains; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

Delay in Release of Assistance to Gujarat

2017. SHRI ANANTRAY DEVSHANKER DAVE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be

pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the financial assistance to the cyclone affected people of Gujarat has not yet been released by the Central Government;

(b) whether it is also a fact that financial assistance announced to the tune of Rs. 200 crores and Rs. SO crores has since been released to Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, respectively, as published in the Gujarati News Papers; and

(c) if so, the reasons for delay in releasing the financial assistance to Gujarat for the cyclone affected people?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) to (c) The entire Central share of Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) to the State for 1998-99 amounting to Rs. 116.12 crore has been released to the State for undertaking relief and rehabilitation measures in the wake of natural calamities. Advance Plan assistance of Rs. 200 crore to Andhra Pradesh and Rs. SO crore to Karnataka has been released. The request of the State Government of Gujarat for assistance of Rs. 610.6S crore from the National Fund for Calamity Relief (NFCR) is under process.

Committee to Probe Suicide of Farmers

2018. SHRI BANGARU LAXMAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether a high level committee has been set up to probe into suicide deaths of farmers in different parts of the country, and for evolving a broad-based crop insurance scheme to avert, avoid or overcome the contingencies which led to suicide by fanners on failure of crops in large numbers in different States last year, and

(b) if so, its composition and terms of reference?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) No High Level Committee was set up to probe into suicide deaths by farmers in different parts of the country. However, a Study Group was constituted in January, 1998 to examine the natur and extent of indebtedness of farmers in the State of Andhra Pradesh and related issues. Details of constitution and terms of reference of the Study Group is given in the enclosed statement *(See* below).

The Study Group has since submitted its report. Follow-up action on the recommendations of the Study Group is being taken.

Statement

Composition of the Study Group:

1. Shri Bhagat Singh, Additional Secretary. Department of Agriculture & Cooperation. — Chairman
2. Managing Director, Natioal Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development. — Member
3. Additional Director General (Plant Protection), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). — Member
4. Shri I.D. Subba Rao, Vice Chancellor, Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, Hyderabad. — Member
5. Commissisoner & Director of Agriculture, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad. — Member

The terms of reference of the Study Group:—

(i) To examine in depth the nature and extent of indebtedness among the farmers in the State of Andhra Pradesh and the magnitude of its incidence particularly in respect of poor farmers;

(ii) To examine the present status of the role of informal sources of farm-credit in 'the State;

(iii) To identify constraints, if any, standing in the way of greater insitutionalisation of the flow of rural credit in 'the State and to suggest measures for increasing the role of public financial institutions (Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and the Cooperative Institutions) in the purvey al of credit to the agricultural and allied sectors.